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Diploma Dilemma

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Less than half of our home economics freshmen graduate from Iowa State. Betsy Nichols discusses the current

Diploma Dilemma

ARE you from a midwestern state? Do you have a grade average from 2.57 to 4 point? Have you completed 2 years of work here? If so, your chances of graduating from Iowa State are good.

When a commencement speaker in the spring surveys a graduating class at Iowa State, the group of home economics women before him is less than half as large as the original class. Student mortality, the term used to designate students leaving school, is high among home economics women. Studies at Iowa State reveal that only 38.8 percent of the women who enter the division in their freshman year receive a degree in home economics.

Why do these students leave? Do their backgrounds and mental capacities affect their dropping out of college?

"In order to answer these questions, several research problems have been carried on at Iowa State," comments Dr. Hester Chadderdon, of the Department of Home Economics Education. "We have attempted to find more about mortality among women for use in planning the home economics courses."

To find the extent of the mortality and some of the causes responsible, data from the college records were analyzed. The years 1936 to 1938 were chosen to avoid the periods of both war and depression.

Startling figures proved that of the 703 freshman women who entered their first quarter at Iowa State, only 273 received degrees within the five periods under study. Of the group who left, the largest number, approximately one-third of the withdrawals, dropped during or immediately after completing three quarters of school. From one-fourth to one-fifth left after their second year. Most of the students who entered their junior year remained to receive a degree.

Determining the reasons proved to be a more difficult problem than obtaining statistics on the number of students leaving. The study attempted to find the effects of low scholarship, low scores on the aptitude test, poor high school preparation, and personal reasons such as financial, illness, marriage, employment or lack of interest.

A definite connection between scholarship and mortality was evident. One-fifth of the withdrawals had a high school average below a 2 point. Only 5 percent of the members of the graduation group had corresponding high school averages. Only one-eighth of those who fell below the 2.57 mark graduated. However, one-fourth of the students who withdrew from school had averages indicating satisfactory college achievement, showing the influence of other factors.

The size of the high schools from which a student entered Iowa State was investigated as a key to her background for college work. Results, however, show little or no relationship. While the largest number of students dropping out came from high schools with

an enrollment under 50, the second largest group was from high schools with over 900 students.

The majority of graduates had received no previous home economics training in high school. Age of the starting freshman was not a significant factor, although more dropped out who entered college at the age of 19 to 20 years than in the 18-year-old group. Economic status of the student proved a minor factor.

GEOGRAPHY offers another piece to the puzzle. Midwestern states not bordering Iowa top the list with 60 percent of their representatives receiving diplomas. Foreign students, women with homes in Story County and women from the Eastern states tie for second place as 50 percent of these groups finish the 4 years. Other counties of Iowa besides Story County lag behind with 38 percent. States bordering Iowa have about 31 percent of their representatives finishing. The South and Far West place low with only 22 percent and 25 percent, respectively, receiving degrees.

Freshman mortality is not a condition peculiar to Iowa State. The United States Office of Education reports that 58 percent of all women enrolled in freshman home economics in 38 land grant colleges leave school before receiving degrees. The University of Oregon loses 31.4 percent of its home economics freshmen; Cornell University has a freshman mortality of 20.1 percent in its home economics college; Texas Technological College, from 37.8 to 52.8.

However, at least one factor contributed to the comparatively low mortality of students in other curricula. In a liberal arts school, both men and women are taking the same course. More men, in whom the desire for a career is stronger, remain for four years. The number of withdrawals in a home economics division is probably influenced by the number of girls who are married before graduation or do not want to follow a career.

Discovery of the 61.2 percent mortality at Iowa State points up several questions to the home economics curricula group planning. How well does a 4-year professional course provide for the needs of students who remain in college only 1 or 2 years? Should there be some way to take care of a group below professional level who lack scholarship aptitude?

"Changes in the freshman program this year were viewed with a consideration of mortality," states Dr. Chadderdon. "We have attempted to carry out three ideas in making these revisions: to form a better basis for the women who are leaving school, to help the freshmen get oriented into college life more easily and quickly and to give a picture of the field of home economics to the student who is choosing from one of the departments of home economics for a career."